

## Roberta DiMezza

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**From:** Antonya Jeffrey <ajeffrey@worthrises.org>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 4, 2025 1:18 PM  
**To:** House Judiciary Committee  
**Subject:** H5350 Supporting Materials  
**Attachments:** 2025.04.01 RI CF Campaign Fact Sheet.pdf; 2025.04.02 - RI House Judiciary Hearing Testimony FINAL.pdf; 2025.02.25 - RI Fiscal Analysis FINAL 2.pdf; 2025 Rhode Island Fact Sheet.pdf

Good Afternoon -- Please see a copy of my testimony from yesterday's hearing along with the fiscal analysis I mentioned, and 2 fact sheets to support this legislation.

Please confirm receipt and feel free to reach out with any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to submit!

Best,  
Antonya

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*Antonya Jeffrey (she/her)*

Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs, Worth Rises

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# CONNECT RHODE ISLAND FAMILIES WITH S0128 & H5350



**Sponsors:**  
**Sen. Kallman**  
**Rep. Felix**

## WHAT WILL S0128 & H5350 DO?

- Allow Rhode Island residents to communicate with their incarcerated loved ones in state prisons and youth detention facilities at no cost
- Ensure access by establishing either a minimum 10:1 ratio of incarcerated people to operable phones, with at least two phones indoors
- Prohibits the state from collecting kickbacks from its prison telecom vendor
- Protects in-person visitation

"I haven't called in years now. Families are unnecessarily strapped. We are forced to go into debt just to maintain connection to our family members inside. And we couldn't do it anymore."

— Mother of two whose husband is incarcerated

## \$1.1M



## \$436k

**Annual spending by families on communication**  
RIDOC charges \$0.029 per minute to speak with an incarcerated loved one, or \$0.59 for a 20-minute phone call. A 20-minute video call costs \$5.00.

**Annual cost of making communication free**  
Providing free communication in prisons is **cost-effective program that promotes rehabilitation** and becoming increasingly so with innovative models being pioneered across the nation.

## SUPPORT CONNECTING FAMILIES BECAUSE...

- **1 in 3 families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt** trying to pay predatory prison telecom vendors to maintain contact and 87% of the financial burden is borne by women.
- Every child deserves to hear "I love you" from their parent. Communication **mitigates the trauma suffered by the 1 in 28 children whose parents are incarcerated.**
- Communication with loved ones disrupts the toxicity of prisons and creates hope. When supported, incarcerated people are more committed to their own success and engaged in rehabilitative behaviors, which studies have shown **decreases incidents in facilities and reduces recidivism, making officers and us all safer.**
- **No program is more accessible and effective at improving reentry success** than communication that strengthens relationships between incarcerated people and their support networks.
- The positive social and fiscal benefits associated with communication significantly outweigh its costs.

## VOTE YES ON S0128 & H5350!



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 5350 to Provide Free Communication  
to People Incarcerated in Rhode Island and Their Families**

*April 3, 2025*

Dear: Chair Craven and the House Judiciary Committee

My name is Antonya Jeffrey, and I am the Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs at Worth Rises, a national non-profit dedicated to ending the exploitation of people impacted by incarceration. I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 5350 to make prison communication free for incarcerated people and their families in Rhode Island, and include a letter from the Connecting Families coalition, a state fact sheet on prison communication, a policy fact sheet regarding the legislation, and a fiscal analysis of the legislation.

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony in regards to this important legislation and thank you to Rep. Felix for sponsoring this legislation. We hope you will take particular note of the powerful stories of people who have been directly impacted by incarceration and how the exorbitant cost of prison communication has weighed on their lives. I will focus my testimony, instead, on the policy arguments and fiscal considerations that support this legislation.

**Worth Rises strongly supports H5350, which would make communication in prisons free for incarcerated individuals and their loved ones.** Worth Rises has helped jurisdictions across the country pass similar policies to provide free communications for incarcerated people and their support networks. We led the first successful state campaign in Connecticut and additional state campaigns in California, Colorado, Minnesota, and Massachusetts. We also led or supported successful local campaigns in New York City, San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Miami. We are currently supporting similar campaigns in over a dozen state and local jurisdictions. Accordingly, we know what it takes to implement this policy and are committed to helping Rhode Island do so.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join others on the forefront of this national movement to connect families with incarcerated loved ones and provide overdue relief to millions by simply making communication free. Today, we estimate that **Rhode Island families spend more than 1.1 million each year to speak to their incarcerated loved ones.** This money comes from the families — including grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends — of those incarcerated in Rhode Island. They are often forced to choose between paying for basic necessities like housing and food and paying to hear the voices of their incarcerated loved ones. In fact, one in three families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt trying to stay connected, and 87% of those bearing this enormous financial burden are women.<sup>1</sup>

However, family support can change how successful a person is both during and after their incarceration. It increases hope, reduces desperation, and encourages positive behavior, which in turn, reduces violence and improves the correctional environment for incarcerated people and correctional officers alike. One correctional administrator from Connecticut remarked about the policy and implementation there, “It’s not going to stop all the incidents, but it’s definitely curbing a lot of them. I understand that there has been some frustration among taxpayers about bearing the burden of the phone calls, but as someone who works inside the walls I can say that it is working and we do appreciate it.” And families have endless stories of how free calls have changed their lives.

Based on our prior work, **we estimate that providing free phone calls to incarcerated people and their loved ones will and cost the state \$436,000 per year.** We base our estimate on known rates charged by leading vendors around the country, which in many cases are much lower than rates charged in Rhode Island, and usage rates in jurisdictions with free communication. Please note that there are always new compensation models rolling out that could further lower the cost.

The bottom line is that the cost of providing free prison communication pales in comparison to what families are currently paying as well as what the state spends on its correctional system and would return much more. Again, studies have consistently shown that communication between incarcerated people and their support networks increases hope inside, strengthens families, mitigates trauma for children facing parental incarceration, improves reentry success, and increases public safety.<sup>2</sup> Providing such communication at no cost would lift a critical burden off the shoulders of Rhode Island families, making these benefits more accessible.

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<sup>1</sup> Criminal Justice Budget and Funding Opportunity Analysis. Public Sector Consultants, 2021.; See also, Program and Special Equipment Fund Revenues and Expenditures. Michigan Department of Corrections. [https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-1441\\_1513-519821--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-1441_1513-519821--,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> Wong, Leah. “Research roundup: The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families.” Prison Policy Initiative, 2021. [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family\\_contact/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/)

In closing, we ask that you vote yes on H5350. Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions at [ajeffrey@worthrises.org](mailto:ajeffrey@worthrises.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Antonya J". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a stylized "J" at the end.

Antonya Jeffrey  
Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs  
Worth Rises